

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TUNIS 07074 151726Z

43

ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 7074

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID, EGEN, PFOR, TS

SUBJECT: TUNISIAN-AMERICAN JOINT COMMISSION

SUMMARY: EMBASSY PROPOSES THAT TUNISIAN-AMERICAN COMMISSION, COVERING WHOLE SPECTRUM OF AMERICAN ACTIVITIES IN TUNISIA, MEET TWICE YEARLY. WHILE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMISSION RISKS WHETTING TUNISIAN APPETITES FOR MORE USG ASSISTANCE, THERE ARE SEVERAL OVERRIDING ADVANTAGES, INCLUDING POLITICAL AND COMMERCIAL PLUSES. EMBASSY REQUESTS WASHINGTON'S COMMENTS ON OUR ANALYSIS AND PROPOSALS. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND. DURING SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA ON NOVEMBER 8, TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF TUNISIAN-AMERICAN JOINT COMMISSION AND SECRETARY APPROVED PROPOSAL. IN HIS FAREWELL REMARKS AT AIRPORT NOV 9 SECRETARY PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED COMMISSION'S ESTABLISHMENT. TUNISIANS ARE EXTREMELY PLEASED WITH THIS DEVELOPMENT, PARTICULARLY SINCE THEY HAVE SOUGHT IN THE PAST TO BRING ABOUT JOINT COMMISSION ADDRESSING ITSELF TO ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE MATTERS. GOT UNDERSTANDS, HOWEVER, THAT COMMISSION APPROVED BY SECRETARY IS BROADER GAUGED, REPRESENTING WHOLE SPECTRUM OF US ACTIVITIES IN TUNISIA.

2. IMPLICATIONS. ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMISSION IS A POLITICAL PLUS IN EMPHASIZING TO TUNISIANS CONTINUING NATURE OF LONG-STANDING CLOSE TUNISIAN-US RELATIONSHIP, PARTICULARLY
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TUNIS 07074 151726Z

AT TIME WHEN USG AID RESOURCES HAVE DWINDLED. REALISTICALLY,

COMMISSION IS UNLIKELY TO INCREASE THESE RESOURCES, BUT IN ADDITION TO COSMETIC VALUE IT DOES OFFER FOLLOWING PRACTICAL ADVANTAGES: (A) PROVIDES FOR REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIZED CONSULTATION REGARDING OUR OVERALL RELATIONSHIP; (B) OFFERS VEHICLE FOR EXAMING WITH TUNISIANS ALL US ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS IN TUNISIA IN SOME DETAIL AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO ONE ANOTHER; (C) AFFORDS OPPORTUNITY FOR AMERICAN SIDE TO BRING MISCELLANEOUS LINGERING PROBLEMS TO ATTENTION OF PANEL OF RESPONSIBLE TUNISIANS OFFICIALS; (D) INDUCES BETTER COORDINATION BETWEEN USG AND PRIVATE AMERICAN ACTIVITIES IN TUNISIA; AND (E) ENHANCES US COMMERCIAL INTERESTS, PARTICULARLY RE ACCESS BY AMERICAN FIRMS TO TUNISIAN NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL MARKETS. A LIABILITY INHERENT IN COMMISSION'S EXISTENCE IS RAISING OF TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT EXPECTATIONS RE INCREASING USG ASSISTANCE.

3. STRUCTURE. TO ENDOW JOINT COMMISSION WITH STATUS AND TO KEEP TUNISIANS HAPPY WE PROPOSE THAT COMMISSION HAVE HIGH-LEVEL TUNISIAN-AMERICAN TITULAR RPT ITITULAR CHAIRMEN, I.E. SECRETARY OR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ON OUR SIDE. WE WOULD PROPOSE THAT OPERATIONAL RPT OPERATIONAL COMMISSION HEAD ON AMERICAN SIDE BE AMBASSADOR THAT THAT EFFECTIVE TUNISIAN HEAD BE OF COMPARABLE RANK. WE SUGGEST THAT COMMISSION MEET TWICE A YEAR, ONCE IN TUNISIA AND ONCE IN WASHINGTON. WE BELIEVE THAT WHEN MEETING HELD IN TUNISIA AN NEA REPRESENTATIVE SHOULD ATTEND, AS WELL AS, IF POSSIBLE, OTHER CONCERNED USG AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES. IF LATTER NOT RPT NOT FEASIBLE, RELEVANT COUNTRY TEAM MEMBERS WOULD PARTICIPATE. WHEN COMMISSION MEETS IN WASHINGTON, ALL CONCERNED USG AGENCIES SHOULD PARTICIPATE. WE WOULD URGE THAT PRIVATE AMERICAN GROUPS ASSISTING TUNISIA ALSO BE REPRESENTED IN COMMISSION, WITH TUNISIANS UNDERSTANDING THAT USG DOES NOT CONTROL THEIR ACTIVITIES. WE DO NOT FAVOR CREATION OF SUB-COMMITTEES GIVEN SMALL SIZE OF PROGRAMS.

4. COVERAGE. OBVIOUS AREAS TO BE COVERED BY COMMISSION ARE (A) ECONOMIC AID; (B) MILITARY ASSISTANCE; (C) CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS; (D) PEACE CORPS; (E) SPECIAL FOREIGN CURRENCY RESEARCH PROJECTS; CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TUNIS 07074 151726Z

(F) USG COMMERCIAL AND INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES, TO INCLUDE OPIC; (G) PRIVATE FOUNDATION ACTIVITIES, POSSIBLY INCLUDING FORD FOUNDATION, PROJECT HOPE, IESC, CARE, CRS, AFME; AND (I) MISCELLANEOUS MINOR MATTERS OF TOPICAL INTEREST, SUCH AS QUESTIONS INVOLVING US CEMETARY AT CARTHAGE.

5. AUTHORITY. WE ASSUME THAT COMMISSION WOULD HAVE NO POWER OF DECISION, BUT RATHER BE STRICLTLY CONSULTATIVE

BODY. USG POSITIONS PUT BEFORE COMMISSION WOULD BE PREVIOUSLY CLEARED AT COUNTRY TEAM LEVEL, WITH PRIOR REFERENCE TO DEPT WHERE APPROPRIATE. FOR AGENCIES NOT REPRESENTED ON COUNTRY TEAM, CLEARANCES WOULD BE OBTAINED IN ADVANCE IN WASHINGTON.

6. ACTION REQUESTED: REQUEST DEPT'S COMMENTS ON ABOVE PROPOSALS AND ANY OTHER THOUGHTS WHICH DEPT MAY HAVE, INCLUDING WHEN COMMISSION SHOULD FIRST MEET. TUNISIAN AMBASSADOR ALI HEDDA, WHO HAS RETURNED TO WASHINGTON, EXPRESSED VIEW THAT FIRST MEETING SHOULD OCCUR BEFORE PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S VISIT TO US, POSSIBLY AS EARLY AS FEBRUARY.
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